

Slavery

and the natural world

Transcript

Transcript

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This transcript is provided for deaf and hard of hearing pupils or teachers, or where there is no facility to play the audio track in the presentation.

Slide 1

Voyages of Discovery (c1400-1600s)

Hundreds of years ago people explored, exploited and colonised large parts of the world.

Explorers made long dangerous journeys on small wooden ships.

Natural historians joined the race to discover new plants to bring back to Europe to study scientifically or for food and medicine.

Slide 2

Why use enslaved Africans?

Many original people in the Americas and European servants died through wars or diseases.

African people were enslaved to work on plantations in the Caribbean and America.

The crops that grew there were in demand and made huge profits for Europeans.

Slide 3

Scale of the trade

The transatlantic slave trade lasted over 300 years.

Historians estimate that 10-15 million people were taken from Africa to the Americas by force.

Other estimates put the numbers as high as 100 million.

Many African people tried to stop the trade but Europeans had guns and more power.

African people took few possessions, except their skills, knowledge and ideas and sometimes a few seeds.

Slide 4

Transport across the Atlantic

Hundreds of African people were crowded into ships and taken to the Caribbean and America.

The journey lasted six to eight weeks in terrible conditions. People were chained in a space 40 cm wide and could not sit up fully or stand.

Equiano was an African who was captured as a child and wrote:

'The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died... This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.'

Slide 5

Food on board ship

Food on slaving ships was often peanuts and maize which originally came from South America.

Drinking water was often dirty and caused many illnesses.

Enslaved Africans had to eat from the same bowls and could not wash easily. Many died of dysentery. Ships' documents show at least 1.25 million Africans died crossing the Atlantic.

Africans often resisted capture and enslavement by refusing to eat or starting revolts in protest. Some chose suicide.

Equiano wrote:

'I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that with the loathsomeness of the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything.'

Slide 6

On the plantations

Many enslaved Africans worked on plantations growing crops such as sugar, rice and cotton. Life on the plantations was very hard and a third of all enslaved Africans died in their first three years in the Caribbean. Punishments were common – people were whipped, tortured and sometimes branded with hot irons. Many African people tried to escape slavery; some were successful but those who were caught were punished even more. In spite of this, African people in the Americas kept aspects of their culture, spirit and determination alive.

The natural historian Hans Sloane wrote:

'For Negligence, they are usually whipt by the Overseers with Lance-wood switches, till they be bloody, and several of the Switches broken... After they are whip'd till they are Raw, some put on their Skins Pepper and Salt to make them smart; at other times their Masters will drop melted Wax on their Skins.'

Slide 7 Abolition and freedom

Many African as well as European people campaigned to end slavery. Europeans typically showed Africans begging to be released, but in reality many Africans actively resisted slavery. They poisoned those who enslaved them and fought against them. A group of escaped enslaved Africans called Maroons were particularly successful at fighting slavery.

Slavery only ended in the Americas at the end of the 1800s; but racial inequalities continue to the present day. Forms of slavery still exist in different parts of the world today.

Slide 8 Daily life

Enslaved Africans were woken at 4.00am, and often worked from 6 in the morning until 6 at night; six days a week.

The food given to enslaved Africans varied from place to place and over time but was very basic.

The ration was usually about 1.36 kilograms (three pounds) of dried meat and a 'peck' of corn (which is about six kilograms) for an adult for a week, and it was given out on Sundays.

Solomon Northrup who was enslaved in America wrote:

'All that is allowed them is corn and bacon, which is given out at the corncrib and smoke-house every Sunday morning. Each one receives, as his weekly allowance, three and a half pounds of bacon, and corn enough to make a peck of meal. That is all – no tea, coffee, sugar, and with the exception of a very scanty sprinkling now and then, no salt...'

Slide 9 Provision grounds

Enslaved Africans were made to grow their own food. They grew okra and rice – plants that they grew in Africa. They used their skills and knowledge to survive.

Many enslaved people used their knowledge of plants and the land, to collect wild foods such as fruits, nuts, and fish. These additional foods really improved the diet of enslaved people. They provided vitamins and minerals as well as extra protein. Fresh fruit and vegetables provided vitamin C and animals were important sources of protein.

The natural historian Patrick Browne wrote about rats:

'Numbers of the negroes roast these animals in the stoke-holes, and eat them; and I have been informed by men of character, who have tasted of them, that they are very delicate meat.'

Slide 10 Breadfruit and ackee

Breadfruit is high in carbohydrate. It originated in Tahiti in the Pacific and was taken to the Caribbean to feed enslaved people cheaply.

William Bligh's first breadfruit journey ended in the mutiny on the Bounty. He only succeeded on his second voyage. Breadfruit is now a staple food in many tropical regions.

When Bligh left Jamaica he took hundreds of plants for the botanist Joseph Banks. One of these was the fruit ackee, now a part of the national dish of Jamaica, 'ackee and saltfish'.

'[ackee was] ... brought here in a Slave Ship from the Coast of Africa, and now grows very luxuriant, producing every Year large Quantities of fruit'.

Slide 11 Legacies

Soul food is the traditional cooking of African-Americans in the Southern United States where slavery was common. The origins of soul food can be traced back to Africa.

Rice, sorghum and okra were all West African and were introduced to the Americas as a result of the slave trade. Enslaved people also used cheap foods with little waste. Soups and stews were boiled over and over again.

Fried foods, foods rich in salt and well cooked vegetables are linked to the diet at the time of slavery.